How to protect your children online

The impact of the Internet in today’s society cannot be ignored nor be underestimated. At one time or another, we have used the Internet for a wide range of needs, ranging from research, getting the perfect holiday destination, finding a new recipe, and connecting with family and friends through social networking sites. For most parents, the fear of what their children get exposed to on the Internet is real. Despite the Internet being very useful to your children, it can at times turn out to be harmful. Children need the Internet for school projects, socializing, watching movies, and many other necessary functions. With this in mind, it would be easier for a parent to make sure that their children are safe online rather than ban them from using the Internet. Here are some practical steps that parents can take towards making the Internet safe for their children.

1. Communicate with your child

Make sure your child knows that they can always talk to you and share their online experience with you. Your child should be comfortable enough to let you know about their experiences and seek your advice on anything. You should also talk to your child first about their use of the Internet. Let them know that it can be great when used correctly. Talk about the consequences of certain actions and their consequences. For instance, discuss with your child the effects of posting their photos, sharing their personal information and participating in various chat rooms. When your children understand the consequences of their actions, they will be able to have a safe online presence. Having an open communication channel with your child will help you monitor their online activities.

1. Get information about the Internet

You need to know how the web works, what sites are available to your child, and what services each site offers. By acquiring this information, you will be able to teach your child about online dangers, and what they can do to avoid these dangers. You can join some sites, just to get a feel of what is going on. When you have the information and online experience, you will be able to guide your children in their online activities. Most importantly are the pornographic websites. Let us just embrace the fact: pornographic sites are strewn all over the Internet! These sites are usually easily accessed because of limited restriction measures. These are some of the sites that a parent ought to mark as no-go zone for their children.

1. Cyber bullying

This is one of the dangers that children face while online. Cyber bullying can be defined as the use of information and communication channels for the deliberate, malicious and repeated hostile behavior against an individual. Your child could end up being a victim of cyber bullies, or could be a cyber bully themselves. Cyber bullying can be more detrimental than making snide comments while on the playground. Modified pictures of your child or online comments about them are more permanent and can cause a lot of distress. Make sure your child understands how cyber bullying works, and what they can do to avoid being a victim. Parents should also ensure that their children understand that cyber bullying is hurtful and wrong. Cyber bullying is also illegal, and if it is traced back to your child, it can get them into trouble. If they make the Internet safe for someone else, it will reduce the incidences of cyber bullying.

1. Establish proper privacy and account settings

Talk to your child about the privacy settings on their online accounts. While you do not want to be invasive or overbearing, let your child know the type of account settings they ought to have so that they can be secure online. Be with your child as they set up their (YouTube) or (Facebook) accounts and help them make it as private as possible. Most default settings allow private information to be in the public setting. With the proper limits set, your child’s online identity will be safe. Since you cannot control everything your child does online, make sure they have adequate privacy settings and that they do not post any photos or videos that can be misinterpreted. When they control what goes online, they will reduce the effects of compromising their online information. It is human to make mistakes, but these mistakes should not cost your child their future. With most colleges and employers making online background checks before making selection decisions, your child needs to make certain that they do not have any videos, photos, or comments that can cost them a college spot.

1. Use parental controls and monitoring settings

You can install monitoring and blocking software to reduce the chances of your child stumbling on the wrong websites. Some Internet Service Providers have control tools that allow parents to impose restrictions on the number of websites that their children visit. You can also create user accounts for each family member, and as the administrator, limit the access that each person has in the house, depending on their age. Keep in mind that no software can replace parental guidance. The blocking software could work best when used to monitor sites that contain adult content. The software should alert you anytime your child pays a visit to these sites. Once this has been brought to your attention, you look for ways to guide and counsel your child.

1. Teach your child to trust their feelings

Teach your child to observe their feelings and especially be aware of how their online usage makes them feel. If they ever feel uncomfortable threatened by someone online, they should inform you or any other trusted adult about this experience. Encourage your child to speak out any doubts or fears they might be facing from their interaction with an online individual or website.

The Internet is here to stay, and we must learn to live with it. Take the necessary steps to make sure that you and your family are safe and that your child protects their online identity.